Two Amazing Events, Dozens of Incredible Stories:

**PRI's Mission:** Create partnerships between people with disabilities and the community

**PRI’s Basic Tenets:** Break down stereotypes and myths, increase awareness, provide income opportunities and add beauty to the world

**The Preparation:** One of the major goals was to build on the success of the first ReelAbilities Minneapolis-St. Paul Disabilities Film Festival (RFF). A major component of that was to enhance the Advisory Board with an Executive Team and to strengthen the group with targeted partners.

**Statistics:** Six members of the Exec. Committee: Jen Reiter, Paula Henn, Kevin May, Norm Munk, Janet Virnig and Dan Reed. Witnessing Jen Reiter’s abilities, her valuable outreach to so many and her dedication to the mission of RFF, Norm asked her to join the PRI Board of Directors in May.

31 Active Advisory Board Members. Their backgrounds varied, from PRI consumers to award-winning filmmakers, but their focus was the same: create the best film festival possible that celebrates the lives of people with disabilities.

Furthermore, we were committed to responding to the recommendation from year one of bringing in more films from Minnesota. So we turned to original partners: the Independent Filmmaker Project of MN (IFP) and Twin Cities Public Television (tpt). Their assistance with curating the film entries and helping create the Filmmaker’s Challenge documentary was invaluable. In kind:

$3,000—IFP  $5,000— tpt

**The Buildup:** Set in motion the many moving pieces that were necessary for us to achieve our festival goals.

Media planning: as part of our marketing efforts we hired a PRI firm, Media Relations. By working with them we realized that we knew quite a bit about generating interest in RFF. In retrospect, we would not have hired the firm.

Launched the MN Filmmaker’s Challenge by reaching out to our Advisory Board, partners and the entire disability and filmmaker communities. For example, notices went out to IFP’s mailing list of 2,000 filmmaker members—the Challenge was also posted on the MN Film and TV Board website.

Executive Advisory Board members traveled to the New York RFF in search of the best films to show in Minneapolis-St. Paul. They brought back strong film recommendations.

Recruited the best partners/sponsors who were as passionate as us about making history with powerful films and events.

11 sister programs recognized RFF’s value and became financial sponsors. Unparalleled cooperative support by them.
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The Hype:

Generating interest in the filmmaker’s challenge was a game changer from the first RFF. It gave us the opportunity to spread the message of the festival to a much broader audience. Promoting the RFF and the Filmmaker’s Challenge through our partner organizations and social media worked much better than we imagined.

Number of film submissions goal: 15-20
Actual number of films submitted: 50

Sponsorships:

91 sponsors—63 gave more than $250!
$90,000 sponsor funds raised
$40,600 in kind sponsor funds

The Cast of Underland II as they were interviewed after their film

Norm and Advisory Committee member Imani on Kare 11

ACCESS PRESS
MINNESOTA'S DISABILITY COMMUNITY NEWS SOURCE

KARE 11
kare11.com

TwinCities.com
PIONEER PRESS
Films: The top 14 films were selected and captioned by tpt. They were shown at the Opening Night kickoff. Of the 50 films submitted, the judges maintained that the first 40 should be in the tpt documentary. We felt compelled to show at least some of the runners up, so we showed 14 of these films that were captioned. We awarded these films an Honorable Mention. These films were shown on Friday morning to a crowd of more than 100 attendees, many from our sister programs.

Volunteers: were coordinated and managed beautifully by Paula Henn. Here are a few of her reflections: This film festival touched me to the core on so many levels -- bringing a community together, inspiring films, stretching and motivating all of us to be active citizens in empowering and ensuring the rights of all abilities. Many people leaving the theater venue had a collective sentiment, "What am I doing with my life?!" They were captivated by these films that portrayed the deep human spirit!!

Statistics: More than 100 volunteers from partners, sponsors, PRI Board Members, staff, clients, parents and friends took part in the festival and were recognized and thanked with certificates.

Attendance: The daily attendance for the RFF varied
Day One Union Depot: 200— daytime  400—evening
Day Two Union Depot: 250— day/evening  Cinema Grill—130
Day Three MacPhail Center for Music: 100— day
Day Four Doubletree Hotel: 400 guests including volunteers
Total: around 1,500 attendees

Venues:
Union Depot—beautiful facility with good accessibility, but not private or great for sound
Cinema Grill—quite accessible, poor projection quality
MacPhail—wonderful space, limited projection capability
Doubletree—like home to us, even with the multi-level spaces, excellent with technology

- Taste of Art partners—ACF Chefs continue to be a challenge, but provided a great selection of food
- ACF Culinary students —were back in their element with the Cupcake Challenge
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**Social Media:** RFF drove us to Social Media, thank goodness we had Jen Reiter driving!

With Jen’s incredible guidance and support PRI jumped into social media in a big way, and will not be the same ever again. We now see the value of spreading our messages through Facebook, Twitter and most importantly, the power of film.

**Facebook:**
- 700 Likes
- 3,500 Reaches
- 700 Fans
- 11,197 Views of Videos

RFF MSP 2015 wanted to expand their social media presence and engage our community in a more personal way. Using videos, photos, regular postings we personalized the way we shared our passion about the festival. It provided an opportunity to tell people why these stories matter and introduce a personal look at our stars (the Wamplers, Stones and Danny Woodburn).

It was a showcase for the incredible work our volunteers did, allowed us to spread our message to a wider audience, and highlight some of our sponsors, service partners and fantastic venues.

We were able to link our Audience Awards website to our social media making these Minnesota short films reach audiences far beyond our state.

ReelAbilities social media in year 2 set PRI up to increase our promotional reach.

Dr Jon Halberg became involved in the festival via a connection with an advisory board member. He is part of the U of M medical school faculty, physician for MN Twins, Director of Mill City Clinic and Medical contributor to MPR. He is an advocate for the connection between medicine and the arts. Given his MPR background, he was the perfect candidate to moderate the post film discussion for **Autistic Like Me**. He helped create a safe environment for a panel of four fathers who parent children with autism.

Joining Norm is Paul D’Arco and Dr. Jon Hallberg at the Autism focused films and discussion group.
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The Events:

At opening night, I noticed a young man in a wheelchair. At Friday’s events, I noticed a young woman taking notes at the films about Autism. When they both showed up at MacPhail Center on Saturday, I approached them separately. It turns out that the woman, named Reem, was from the United Arab Emirates and was hoping to bring disability issues to the forefront in her country. Several of us enjoyed talking with her before she was left for Chicago.

A bit later, I saw the young man from opening night, talking with the Wampler’s. His name is Tyler. We talked about films, his diving accident, and how he reached out to Joe Stone, who invited him to the Minneapolis ReelAbilities. Tyler was looking for a way to get involved and to help others. He flew back to Chicago on Sunday with Reem’s contact info...we hope they were able to meet up after experiencing RFF in Minneapolis.

Film screenings Thursday morning/afternoon and Friday morning:

There were over 300 people from our sister agencies attending these films. Because these films were open to the public, we had a nice addition of people from the general community.

MN Secretary of State Steve Simon opened RFF with powerful words regarding inclusion and diversity.

Photographer Emmet Hayes chronicled the day via photos. He was stunned at all that went into making Opening Day such a success. “And then I arrived at Taste of Art and was blown away at the size of the crowd and the energy. What a way to cap off a tremendous festival!”

Another volunteer, Sydney Hays, offered this: “Congratulations on a successful RFF over the weekend! I want to extend my gratitude once more for your help in getting me involved with this event and connecting me with so many of your incredible peers at PRI, tpt and far, far beyond. I found it extremely fulfilling to work alongside such intelligent, capable people who share a similar enthusiasm for life and work as I do.”

Sydney Hayes’ duties were to coordinate and coach winning filmmakers during tpt’s filming of “All Abilities Showcase.” Here she is meeting with “Bipolar Snapshot” filmmaker, Christian Finch.
People were enchanted with the Union Depot and Christos Restaurant and food. We heard countless comments on the beautiful venue.

Joe Stone’s film: Awe inspiring, so impressed with Joe’s ability to connect with the audience

People were really excited about Danny Woodburn’s acting workshop.

The small audience at Riding my way back, a film about vets recovering from PTSD and suicidal tendencies, were emotionally caught up in the film; it was extremely depressing but left one with hope for veterans through different therapies.

Danny Woodburn was a great comedian...even though Sunday’s program went way too long, people really enjoyed how funny he was.

At ToA, People could not stop talking about: 1. How amazing the cupcakes looked/tasted   2. How great the food stations were.

MacPhail Center venue was beautiful but not extremely conducive to showing films.

Testimonials:

- “ReelAbilities was fun, empowering, and inspirational! It was amazing to see individuals with differing abilities use their strength, courage and determination to do things beyond the imaginable. I was in awe the entire time and so grateful to volunteer for a wonderful program!”  Volunteer Joni Beck

- "As a filmmaker being a part of ReelAbilities opening night was an incredibly rewarding experience. Not only were we able to share our film with over 400 people, but more importantly I had the privilege of seeing and hearing so many other wonderful stories from people of all abilities, helping me realize the amazing power and importance of connecting with other in our community. One of the many highlights was being interviewed for the TPT documentary celebrating the 25th anniversary of the ADA. As a filmmaker it was such an honor to be able share my story and to help inspire others to tell their stories through film. The night was truly magical and just the beginning of a life changing event that followed throughout the weekend.”  Kevin May - Filmmaker/President, Hi-Fly’n Productions

- A local Occupational Therapist Tonya Rich said: "The social media really felt personal and kept me involved in the festival when I couldn't attend. being able to access the short films via the audience awards was a really fantastic surprise...I want more!"

- Valerie Deus was a member of the IFP MN evaluation team. Here are her comments: “We have a vibrant arts community here in the Twin Cities, and that vibrancy was reflected in the films I watched. The range of stories highlighted our shared humanity. What a journey!"

- “Judging the submissions for the ReelAbilities Call to MN Filmmakers of All Abilities on behalf of Independent Filmmaker Project MN was definitely an enriching, inspiring experience. Not only was I deeply moved by the stories of the individuals represented in the films, but also amazed by how many local organizations exist to serve people with disabilities and immensely improve their quality of life.”  Reilly Tillman of IFP MN.
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Next Steps:

- Two separate families approached Norm to discuss enrolling their adult children at PRI
- Set up debriefing meetings for: Executive Advisory Board and Advisory Board
- Start planting seeds with PRI employers and our corporate partners to sponsor the next MN Call to Filmmakers and ReelAbilities Film Festival.
- Continue to build and strengthen our partnerships. We have proven that there is power in numbers and that working together makes a huge difference.
- Meet with the nonprofit ReelAbilities partners to:
  - Properly thank all sponsors and partners
  - Debrief them: attendance, interesting stats, monies raised, etc. Meet in August.
  - Work on grants—the word “partnerships” is a buzz word when approaching granters and foundations. Few organizations have as good a reputation as PRI when it comes to building quality partnerships.
- Assist PRI Leadership Team to look for quality volunteer opportunities for clients to help strengthen their work-readiness skills. (mailings, small assembly jobs)
- Work with PRI’s Employment Specialists to gather potential job placement leads from ReelAbilities sponsors.
- Attempt to engage them in some of our fundraising efforts, like MITS, GTTM Day
  - Ask that they consider hosting art shows at their place of business

The Future:

1. Consolidate and consider all the feedback that we generate.
2. Meet with Executive Advisory Committee, PRI Board members and key funders and determine the best path to take. For example, do we want to run ReelAbilities just the same, modify it to look similar to how we manage Made in the Shade, or does another route look more appealing?
3. Furthermore, do we work towards merging RFF with other more established film festivals such as the MPLS/St. Paul International Film Festival and/or the Twin Cities Film Festival. We could introduce and manage the Disability portion of these festivals.
4. It will be interesting to see how well the tpt documentary All Abilities Showcase is received. Do we continue to offer the Call to MN Filmmakers and expand it?
5. Should PRI consider an internal Call for Entries from our various departments to make a short film: vocational, Glee Club, volunteering in the community, self advocacy, etc.?
6. Discuss feature films vs documentaries. Were there too many documentaries in the festival this year?
7. Relook at RFF/ToA, should we further consolidate?
Two Amazing Events, Dozens of Incredible People:

Kevin Thorson and son—great new partners and supporters!

Steve and Elizabeth Wampler share our vision of opening doors and minds through film

Great Board Member and Phenomenal RFF promoter!

A True Star, but one of many PRI Volunteers!
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Danny Woodburn with his Minnesota native wife Amy Buchwald

Actor/artist Jenett W and PRI COO Julie Zbaracki

PRI Parent, Family and Friends Council Member Debby Grote and auction donor and volunteer Melody Mousavi

Cast and crew of winning film “A Perfect Match”
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Summit Manor Owners and longtime PRI supporters David and Amber McLaughlin

Award winning filmmaker Kevin Fee with his wife and former PRI staff, Elizabeth, celebrate at ToA

A group of our sister program partners enjoy Opening Night with Norm

Key Advisory Board member/sponsor Tom Barry recruited an incredible group of volunteers to welcome and interview guests and filmmakers on opening day
Now that is a serving of paella! Just one example of incredible choices for ToA guests!

Fred Borstad, a 100% participation PRI board members with Norm & Steve and Karen Heckler from TC Jazz Festival

Stars and filmmakers Amy Rosenthal, Joe Stone, Kevin May and Henry

Longtime PRI Board Member and supporter Jeff Ericson, with wife Lorie and friends Bill Whitney and Corrine Pulvermacher
Once again this year, Chef Paul orchestrated an incredible menu and presentation of wonderful food for ToA guests. Joining him are Scott Parks, Ella, wife Shelly and an aspiring chef, who happens to have an infant daughter with Down syndrome.

Board Member Kevin Hofman and wife Micki have continuously supported PRI with the generosity and time.

Norm and great supporter, sponsor and Cup Cake Challenge judge Master Pastry Chef John Kraus

Executive Committee members Paula Henn and Jen Reiter share a great moment with volunteer Joni Beck.

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